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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15-21 May 1984

COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE POUR L'AFRIQUE

Cinquième réunion du Comité technique préparatoire plénier

Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie, 15-21 mai 1984

PROVISIONAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS/LISTE PROVISOIRE DES PARTICIPANTS

ECA MEMBER-STATES/ETATS MEMBRES DE LA CEA

ALGERIA/ALGERIE

S.E. M. Mesloub Hocine, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade d'Algérie, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

M. Djannit Said, Premier Secrétaire, Ambassade d'Algérie, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

M. Delmi Boudjemaa, Premier Secrétaire, Ambassade d'Algérie, Addis-Abeba Ethiopie

. .

ANGOLA

M. Afonso Gonçalves, Fonctionnaire du Ministère des Relations extérieures, Luanda, Angola

M. Francisco Antonio Gonçalves, Fonctionnaire supérieur en matière des planification, Luanda, Angola

Mme. Clotilde Da Silva Mariano, Fonctionnaire supérieure en matière des finances, Luanda, Angola

BENIN

M. Houeton Nestor, Directeur général adjoint, Ministère du plan, statistique et de l'analyse économique, Cotonou, Benin

BURUNDI

S.H. M. Simbananiye Artémon, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Burundi, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

M. Kado Amédée, Secrétaire, Ambassade du Burundi, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

CAMEROON/CAMEROUN

Mr. Neeck Jean-Philippe, Sous-Directeur, Ministère du Plan et de l'aménagement du territoire, Yaoundé, Cameroun

Mr. Kengne, Boniface, Sous-Directeur des Services techniques et de la maintenance, Ministère des PTT, Yaoundé, Cameroun

Mr. Tanwo Georges, Sous-Directeur coopération, Ministère du Plan et de l'aménagement du territoire, Yaoundé, Cameroun

CHAD/TCHAD

M. Sabour Moussa Tcha, Administrateur civil en chef, Ministère des affaires étrangères et de la coopération, Ndjamena, Tchad

M. Blamsia Braoussala, Adjoint au chef de Division, Equipements et production, Ministère du Plan et de la reconstruction, Ndjamena, Tchad

M. Bahuana Lebbeorran, Chargé d'affaires a.i., Ambassade du Tchad, Addis-Abeba Ethiopie

CONGO

S.E. M. Bounkoulou Benjamen, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Congo, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

M. Pickat-Banga Pierre, Conseiller du Ministre du Plan, Ministère du Plan, Brazzaville, République populaire du Congo

M. Mouellé Marcel, Directeur des synthèses économiques, Brazzaville, Congo

M. Mahoungou Louis, Conseiller Ambassade, Brazzaville, Congo

M. Mavinga-Bata, Chargé de la coopération internationale, Brazzaville, Congo

DJIBOUTI

M. Hassan Idriss Ahmed, Conseiller au Ministère des affaires étrangères et de la coopération, Djibouti

M. Moussa Elmi Guelle, Conseiller, Ambassade de Djibouti, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

EGYPT/EGYPTE

H.E. Mr. Wafik Hosny, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Egypt, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Emirat Abdel-Khalek, General Director, Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Moustafa Hussien, Diplomat, Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Notal El-Sayed, First Secretary, Engassy of Egypt, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Mohamed Abdel-Hamed Kassem, Third Secretary, Embassy of Egypt, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Khair Abdel-Latif, Diplomat, Cairo, Egypt

Mr. Ahmed El-Ghmrawy, Diplomat, Cairo, Egypt

ETHIOPIA/ETHIOPIE

Mr. Tadesse Gebru, Head, Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dr. Dender W. Mariam, Head, Macro-Planning Department, Central Planning Supreme Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Mekonnen Manyazewal, Expert, Central Planning Supreme Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Saied Abdulkadir, Senior Expert, Central Planning Supreme Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Bekele Geletu, Team Leader - UN Technical Co-operation, Central Planning Supreme Council, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

GAMBIE/GAMBIA

Mr. Charles Thomas, Senior Assistant Secretary, Banjul, Gambia

GHANA

Mr. Patrick Hayford, Counseller, Foreign Service Officer, Ghana Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, U.S.A.

Mr. E.K.M.A. Gomez, Counsellor, Ghana Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

GUINEA/GUINEE

Mr. Aipha Abdoul Diallo, Directeur général des Affaires économiques, Ministère des affaires économiques et financières, Conakry, Guinée

Mr. Diallo Chaïkou Yaya, Directeur des Nations Unies, Ministère de la Coopération internationale, Conakry, Guinée

GUINEE/EQUATORIALE/EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Mr. Eulogio Oyo Riquesa, Chargé d'affaires, Ambassade de la Guinée équatoriale, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Domingo N. Edu, Deuxième Secrétaire, Ambassade de la Guinée équatoriale, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Lino Sima Ecua, Deuxième Secrétaire, Ambassade de la Guinée équatoriale, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

IVORY COAST-COTE D'IVOIRE

Mr. Hamza Sallah, Conseiller, Ambassade de Côte d'Ivoire, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Kouassi Bile S., Premier Conseiller, Ambassade de Côte d'Ivoire, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

KENYA

Mr. Mwambia, J.K., Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nairobi, Kenya

Dr. Owilla Ouma Olwa, Principal Economist, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. Mohamed Ali, First Secretary, Embassy of Kenya, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. B. N. Mwanzia, 3rd Secretary, Embassy of Kenya, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

LESOTHO

Mr. John B. Maieane, Commissioner of Trade and Industry, Department of Trade and Industry, Maseru, Lesotho.

Mr. Ntebalens Mothepu, Senior Planning Officer, Central Planning and Development Office, Maseru, Lesotho

LIBERIA

H.E. Mr. Nathaniel Eastman, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Liberia, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. James Molly Scott, Counsellor, Embassy of Liberia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

LIBYA/LIBYE

Mr. Mohamed K. Akrout, Member of Libyan People's Bureau, Tripoli, Libya

Mr. Tahir O. Shaban, People's Bureau of Foreign Liaison, Triploli, Libya

Mr. Ezzedin Ben Saoud, General People's Committee of Planning, Tripoli, Libya

Mr. Abdalla A.B. Bengesher, General People's Committee of Communication, Tripoli, Libya

MALAWI

Mr. Fredrick Sikwese, Head of Project Implementation, Lilongwe, Malawi,

Mr. Joseph Khonyongwa, Principal Treasury Economist, Ministry of Finance, Lilongwe, Malawi

MALI

Dr. Touré Bassary, Directeur adjoint coopération internationale, Ministère des affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale, Bamako, Mali

Mr. Kabiné-H-Diane, Economic Adviser, Ministry of Planning, Bamako, Mali

MAROCCO/MAROC

H.E. M. Saad Eddine Taïb, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Maroc, Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. Boulouiz Bouchra, Fonctionnaire, Rabat, Maroc

Mr. Tadlaoui Jalil, Représentant du Maroc auprès de l'OUA, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Chagraoui Mohamed, Diplomat, Représentant du Maroc auprès de l'OUA, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

MOZAMBIQUE

Mr. S.E. Katawala, Counsellor and Chargé d'affaires, Mozambique Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

NIGER

Mr. Hanouncu Djibrill, Conseiller au Cabinet du Premier Ministre, Niamey, Niger

Mr. Magagi M.G. Zouladaïni, Ministère du Plan, Niamey, Niger

S.E.M. Abdou Malam Moussa, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Niger, Addis Ababa, Ethiopie

M. Ardaly Moctar, Ambassade du Niger, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopie

NIGERIA

Mr. Gilbert P.O. Chikely, Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of National Planning, Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. Mr. A.B.J. Blankson, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Nigeria, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dr. Emman Ola Adebgeyeni, Director, Federal Ministry of Transport and Aviation, Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. Aiyegboyim A. Alabi, Director, Federal Ministry of National Planning, Lagos, Nigeria

Dr. Solomon O. Akpata, Director, (AGRIC), Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. Abdul Bin Rimdap, Counsellor, Embassy of Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. Enny E. Onobu, Counsellor, Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. F.A. Adun, Deputy Secretary, Lagos, Nigeria

Mrs. O.M. Lipede, Deputy Secretary Policy and Planning, Federal Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Lagos, Nigeria

Mr. Abbe M.I., Administrative Officer, Federal Ministry of National Planning, Lagos Nigeria

RWANDA

Mr. Kabanda Célestin, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Rwanda, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Rugaravu Appolinaire, Directeur général de la Planification, Ministère du Plan, Kigali, Rwanda

Mr. Musangamfura Photiolos, Directeur général de l'industrie, Ministère de l'industrie, des mines et de l'artisanat

Mr. Rugwizangoga Wenceslas, Premier Secrétaire, Ambassade du Rwanda, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

REPUBLIQUE CENTRAFRICAINE/CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Mr. Samba-Paula, Chargé de missions, Bangui, République centrafricaine

SENEGAL

Mr. Santos Diossy, Economiste MPC, Dakar, Sénégal

SIERRA LEONE

H.E. Mr. Francis Karemo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Sierra Leone Embassy, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. David A.B. Minah, Acting Development Secretary, Ministry of Development and Economic Planning, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Mr. Abdoul R. Kouroma, First Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Mr. Gustavus Williams, First Secretary, Sierra Leone Embassy, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

SUDAN

Mr. Abd El Magid Ali Hassan, Ambassador, Director of Economic Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Khartoum, Sudan

Mr. Bader El Deen Mohamed Salih, Senior Inspector, Ministry of Co-operation, Commerce and Supply, Khartoum, Sudan

SUDAN (Cont'd/Suite)

Mr. Bushra Haimed Fadlalla, Assistant under-Secretary for Economy, Khartoum, Sudan

Mr. Mustafa Hashim, Diplomat, Sudan Embassy, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

TANZANIA/TANZANIE

Mr. John M. Kimune, Economist, DEVPLAN, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania

Mr. Alex C. Massinda, Counsellor, Tanzania Embassy, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

TOGO

Mr. Odaye Komlavi, Chef de la Division des études techniques et de la synthèse, Direction de la coordination du plan, Ministère du plan, Lomé, Togo

ZAMBIA/ZAMBIE

H.E. Mr. G. Chipampata, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Zambia, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. A.M. Lilanda, Under-Secretary, Lusaka, Zambia

Mr. Lennard Mchata, Ag. Director, Economic and Technical Co-operation, NCDP, Lusaka, Zambia

Mr. Njobvu Elesani Dickson, Senior Economist, Ministry of Finance, Lusaka, Zambia

Mr. O.C. Lungwe, Zambia Embassy, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Gworge R. Nzala, First Secretary, Zambia Embassy, Addis Ababa

ZAIRE

S.E. M. Maku Yizila, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Ambassade du Zaïre, Addis-Abéba, Ethiopie

Mr. Mpiry Opine, Chef de la Division des études au Plan, Kinshasa, Zaïre

Mr. Mpiry Opine, Fonctionnaire au Plan, Kinshasa, Zaire

Mr. Leba Mawa Ossay, Conseiller, Ambassade du Zaïre, Kinshasa, Zaïre

Mr. Ngoy Kapaji, Consultant au Département de l'économie nationale, industrie et commerce extérieur, Kinshasa, Zaïre

Mr. Kakwenda Mbaya, Conseiller économique du Commissaire d'Etat au Plan, Ambassade du Zaïre, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

Mr. Luaba Bula, Chef de Bureau CEA, Ministère des affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale, Kinshasa, Zaire

Mr. Tukumbana-Die-Kamana, Secrétaire administratif, Ambassade du Zaïre, Addis-Abeba, Ethiopie

ZIMBABWE

H.E. Dr. Tichanona Jokonya, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Zimbabwe, Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. D.C. Chigiga, Minister/Counsellor, Zimbabwe Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. G.J. Mariga, First Secretary, Zimbabwe Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. C.C. Mashiri, Information Officer, Zimbabwe Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

OBSERVER

U.N. MEMBER STATES NOT MEMBERS OF ECA/ETATS MEMBRES
DES U.N. NON MEMBRES DE LA CEA

CANADA

Mr. William Brett, Embassy of Canada, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CHINA

Mr. Chen Youngcai, Economic Counsellor, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Lin Kun, Second Secretary, Embassy of China, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

CUBA

Ms. Maria Teresa Rodriguez, First Secretary, P.O. Box 5623, Embassy of Cuba Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

FRANCE

Mr. Lapouge Jacques, First Secretary, Embassy of France, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Mario de Zamaroczy, Ministère des Relations Extérieures, Embassy of France, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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H.E. Mr. Ruediger von Pachelbel - GEHAG, Head of Delegation, Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Walter Weinberger, Dep. Head of Delegation, Fed. Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Mr. Johann-Heinrich Ernst, Second Secretary, Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Horsto Siffrin, Second Secretary, Embassy of Federal Republic of Germany, Addis, Ababa, Ethiopia

INDIA/INDE

Mr. Arun Kumar Singh, Second Secretary, Embassy of India, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

UNITED KINGDOM

Mr. Michael Leslie Alcock, Second Secretary, Embassy of United Kingdom, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Mr. V.P. Kasatkin, Head of Dept, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USSR

Mr. A.I. Nikiforov, Second Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow, USSR

KOREA/KOREE

H.E. Mr. Deuk Po Kim, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Embassy of Korea, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Sohn Hoon, Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Korea, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

SWITZERLAND/SUISSE

Mr. Cousin Francis, Secretary of the Embassy, Swiss Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

UNITED NATIONS BODIES/AGENCES DES NATIONS UNIES

REGIONAL COMMISSIONS LIAISION OFFICE

FAO

Mr. Anthony Victor Obeng, Regional Cooperation and Liaision Officer, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO/UN), Rome, Italy

Mr. Tarekegne Taka, Chief, Regional Bureau for Africa, FAO, Rome, Italy

IDEP

Mr. Essam Montasser, Director, IDEP, Dakar, Senegal

ILO

Mr. Shyam B.L. Nigam, Chief, JASPA, ILO, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mrs. Albastros, Programme and Relations Officer, ILO, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. A. Salim, Regional Labour Economist, ILO

Mr. Hailu Telahun, Senior Programme Coordinator, ILO, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

ITC

Mr. Juan F. Laub, Liaison Officer ITC/ECO, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

UNCHS-HABITAT

Mr. Joseph Mungai, Habitat, Nairobi, Kenya

UNCSTD

Mr. Rana K.D.N. Singh, Director, UNCSTD, UN Plaza, New York

UNCTAD

Mr. Abd Alla Abbas, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations, Geneva

UNDP/PNUD

Mr. Alieu N. Sallah, Acting Head, UNDP/Liaison Office, Addis Ababa

Mr. Salif Ndiaye, Chief, Regional Proj. Division, UNDP, New York

Mr. Herbert M.A. Onitiri, Special Adviser, UNDP

UNESCO

Mr. Awad Idris, UNESCO Representative to Ethiopia and Liaision officer with ECA and OAU, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Abdalla Abdinasser, Programme Specialist, UNESCO, ROSTA, P.O. Box 30592, Nairobi, Kenya

UNFPA

Mr. Abdalla Baghoth, c/o UNDP, Addis Ababa

UPU

Dr. Peter Temu, Chief, Policy Development and Economic Analysis
Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Rome, Italy

WHO-AFRO

Dr. Mesfin Demisse, WHO, P.O. Box 3069, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

WIPO

Mr. Thiam I., Director, External Relations Division, WIPO - 1211 Geneva

INTER AFRICAN COFFEE ORGANIZATION

Mr. Arega Worku, Secretary General, Inter African Coffee Organization, B.P. 710, Abidjan

ADB/BAD

Mr. McClain, J.W., Sr. Economist, Bensonville, Liberia

ARCEDEM

Mr. Subdeb Mundu, ARCEDEM, PMB 19, UI. PO. Ibadan, Nigeria

AFRICAN REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TECHNOLOGY

Dr. D. Babatunde Thomas, B.P. 7435, Dakar, Senegal

ARSO

Mr. Zaudu Pelleha, ARSO, P.O. Box 57363, Nairobi, Kenya

REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TRAINING IN AERIAL SURVEYS

Dr. S.O. Ihemadu, Director, P.M.B. 5545, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

IDF

Ms. Anne Doich, Senior Economist, 700, 19th St. NW, Washington D.C. USA

Mr. Omar Kabbaj, Deputy Director, IDF, 700, 19th Street NW, Washington DC, USA

OAU/OUA

Dr. David Tonry, Chief, Industrial Technology Section, OAU

Mr. Orugi Aseka, OAU, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. V.E. Stanchevsky, Chief, Labour and Population, OAU, Addis Ababa

Mr. Teshome Mesfin, Chief of Section, OAU, Addis Ababa

Mr. E. Gesano, Chief of Econ. Research, OAU, Addis Ababa

Dr. J. Sorie Conteh, OAU, Addis Ababa,

Dr. Nur, Head of Division, OAU, Addis Ababa

Mr. F. Kinuma, Head, Cooperation Division, OAU, Addis Ababa

Mr. Mirut Befecadu, OAU, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Mr. Tshinanga Mukadi-Matoko, Demographer, OAU, Addis Ababa

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Fifth meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15-21 May 1984

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Nineteenth session of the Commission and tenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24-28 May 1984

DRAFT REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP IN NEW YORK ON THE INITIATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE CRITICAL ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA TO THE 10TH MEETING OF ECA CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS, ADDIS ABABA, 24-28 MAY 1984

(This report has been adopted by the Working Group on Economic Questions of the African Group in New York and is subject to final endorsement of the African Group of the Whole.)

DRAFT REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP IN NEW YORK ON THE INITIATIVE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE CRITICAL ECONOMIC SITUATION IN AFRICA TO THE 10TH MEETING OF ECA CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS, ADDIS ABABA, 24-28 MAY 1984

Introduction

1. Following the announcement of the United Nations Secretary-General's initiative on January 9, 1984, the African Group in New York welcomed the initiative, and established a Working Group to monitor and follow-up the initiative, and to present recommendations to the African Group with a view to preparing an input in the 10th Conference of Ministers of the Commission

2. The Working Group met several times and conducted informal exchanges with senior officials of the United Nations Secretariat; there-after, the Working Group presented its recommendations to the Group of the Whole and on the basis of these recommendations, the African Group adopted this report.

3. Since most of the necessary information with regard to the Secretary-General's initiative will be presented by the ECA secretariat and in particular by the Secretary-General's personal representative, the report will not duplicate that effort, nor does it attempt to address all the details of the serious economic situation in Africa, and the actions necessary to deal with the situation.

4. This report, is, an internal African document addressed to the ECA Ministers by the African Group in New York. It should, therefore, be considered in that context. Although the report addresses a few points and presents a few recommendations, it is hoped that, as an input in the deliberations of the ECA meeting, it would be useful.

The Secretary-General's initiative and its potential

5. The United Nations Secretary-General's initiative is a culmination of several previous appeals, including General Assembly resolutions and appeals by FAO and other agencies, with regard to the deteriorating economic situation in Africa and the need for concerted international action to deal with it. Most of the previous calls and initiatives dealt with individual countries subregions, or sectors with particular emergencies like food situation and drought or particular problems like refugees. The Secretary-General's initiative, however, is a general appeal focusing attention to the serious situation facing almost all African countries, addressing the overall situation in Africa both in its emergency phase and medium- and long-term aspects.

6. Although the Secretary-General's initiative is addressed to the international community as a whole, and in particular to donor countries and the organizations of the United Nations system, its success, as a catalyst, would to a great extent depend on the proper pursuance and efforts of African Governments, individually and collectively, to keep it alive and to ensure that concrete results are achieved.

7. For African Governments the initiative and the involvement of the Secretary-General of the United Nations presents a good opportunity and a favourable atmosphere to achieve an effective mobilization of international support, translated into additional financial and technical resources. Since, in general, African countries have no access to capital markets, these additional resources must be concessional.

8. The initiative as well as the emergency situation also offer a suitable opportunity to African Governments to adopt concrete measures aimed at improving the management of external assistance, including its relevance, impact and better integration in the overall domestic developmental efforts and the national plans and priorities.

9. Since the countries of Africa are the subject and the beneficiaries of the Secretary-General's initiative, they have a special responsibility in supporting and furthering that initiative. The prevailing understanding and emergency support on the part of donors and international organizations should provide an incentive for vigorous action by African Governments to ensure the success, in concrete terms, of the initiative.

Recommendations

10. The following are a few recommendations that could complement or reinforce recommendations by the ministerial meeting. It should be reiterated here that the Lagos Plan of Action remains the basic blueprint for action by African Governments individually and collectively. Furthermore, the demands articulated by the Group of 77 and the non-aligned movement with regard to international economic co-operation in general, could be reflected, as they relate to Africa, in the recommendations of the ministerial meeting.

At the national level

11. To ensure the efficient and effective utilization of external resources, African Governments should exercise their central role in ensuring co-ordination at the national level of the activities of the organizations of the United Nations system and those of bilateral donors. To a large extent this role can be enhanced by the establishment or designation of an effective co-ordinating mechanism. This could be an existing institution, a new institution, an individual or a national multisectoral committee. The co-ordinating mechanism is a policy tool for the Government to ensure the co-ordination of the mobilization, utilization and monitoring of the external assistance from bilateral and multilateral sources, and to ensure the integration of this assistance in the overall efforts at the national level. The specific role and mandate will be determined by each Government.

12. The overall objective of the co-ordinating machinery is the efficient and effective use of existing or additional external resources, through:

(i) Providing an overview of the external inputs and their integration into national efforts;

(ii) Providing liaison at national level with the special representative of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Resident Co-ordinator, Representative of agencies, as well as with representatives of bilateral donors;

(iii) Ensuring the elimination of duplication in external assistance and the identification of gaps in the assistance;

(iv) Liaising and overseeing contacts and visits of missions to facilitate provision of information;

(v) Compile and present the urgent needs, in all fields.

At the international level:

General

African Governments should vigorously seek to improve both the volume and quality of external assistance from bilateral and multilateral donor countries and institutions.

Volume

There must be sustained pressure on donors to provide additional substantial resources to assist African countries in the emergency phase and the medium term in order to regain balance to resume sustained development. The solution to the economic situation in Africa must necessarily address both emergency situation as well as medium-and long-term aspects of the crisis.

Quality

Through internal policies and arrangements, and in consultations with bilateral and multilateral donors, African Governments should strive to improve the quality and effectiveness of assistance they receive through insuring:

- Reduction of the cost of aid, especially the cost of external consultants and experts. Serious effort through various ways and means should be taken to reduce the cost of aid, e.g. by greater reliance on local expertise, greater resort to TCDC, United Nations volunteers, short-term consultants, etc. The cost, duration, relevance and necessity of external expertise should always be vigorously examined, before it is accepted by Governments;

- Procedures and regulations of aid must continuously be simplified and streamlined in order to eliminate unnecessary delays at every step of the process. Speedy disbursement of resources should be ensured.

Resources

African Governments, individually and collectively, should vigorously support and complement the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General and other efforts within the United Nations system, to mobilize resources to meet the immediate

needs of African Governments to deal with the emergency phase, as well as medium- and long-term aspects. Existing channels and opportunities, exclusively or partially targeted to Africa include:

(i) Appeals by FAO and other agencies for increased emergency food aid, including assistance in transporting, storing and distributing food aid;

(ii) Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa for which detailed requirements and specific projects are provided by affected African Governments;

(iii) IFAD;

(iv) Replenishment of IDA or supplementary arrangement to meet the shortfall in resources;

(v) UNDP round tables, World Bank Consultative Groups and other consultative meetings, in which needs and proposed activities by individual African countries are examined;

(vi) Appeals for special economic assistance programmes for individual African countries;

(vii) Resources for various United Nations programmes and funds (UNDP, UNICEF...) and to special funds administered by UNDP (Sudano-Sahelian, CDF, special measures for LDCs ...);

(viii) Industrial Development Decade for Africa and Transport and Communication Decade;

(ix) Relevant facilities within IMF, World Bank, ADB and other regional institutions.

Further Recommendations

1. In view of the support and understanding prevailing in the donor community, the ministerial meeting should consider how to bring the situation in Africa to the attention of the London Summit of the seven major industrial countries (beginning June 1984). There are indications that this issue is likely to be considered by the Summit. African Governments should fully utilize this occasion.

2. The economic situation in Africa is a priority area for consideration in the second regular session of ECOSOC in Geneva (4-27 July). Participation of some African ministers in that debate is a significant political gesture.

3. The ministerial meeting could also consider other ways and means of following up the Secretary-General's initiative to ensure the mobilization of international support.